

Downtown Norfolk bus station opens in January

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The new bus transfer station, photographed on Dec. 23, 2015, is located on St. Paul's Boulevard in Norfolk and is scheduled to open soon.

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The city's new downtown bus station has an amenity for passengers: a climate-controlled indoor waiting area.

And, perhaps best of all , it won't smell like urine.

Norfolk City Councilman Andy Protogyrou raised concerns about offensive odors at a Dec. 15 council meeting, saying that a similar facility in Hampton, also operated by Hampton Roads Transit, smelled so bad that riders preferred to wait outside .

“They were always outside because they couldn’t stomach being in it,” Protogyrou said. “If that is any idea of how we’re going to end up here, we’re going to have some serious problems.”

An HRT official at the meeting, Ray Amoruso, assured Protogyrou that the Norfolk station, with its 1,600-square-foot waiting area, would be kept clean. He also told the councilman that the Hampton facility has been cleaned up, too.

Odors aside, “we’ve never had a climate-controlled area to wait for buses, so there’s a lot of excitement behind that,” Paul Filion, a transportation construction project manager for the city, told the City Council .

It’s called the Downtown Norfolk Transit Center, the bus station that the city plopped right in the St. Paul’s Quadrant, to the dismay of those who have spent years working on a redevelopment plan for that area.

But council members decided on that location because they couldn’t find a better, affordable alternative, The Virginian-Pilot reported in 2013.

More than four years in the making, the terminal will open to the public Jan. 17. Once operating, the city expects an average of 5,000 to 6,000 daily bus patrons.

Located at 434 St. Paul’s Blvd., the station also has public restrooms, indoor and outdoor benches, bike racks and security cameras.

The station will have 14 working bus bays and serve as many bus routes.

With that much traffic, the city had the concrete pavement pigmented darker so leaking fluid and other stains from the buses wouldn’t stand out, Filion told the council.

“And those are lessons learned,” Filion said. “We’re pretty proud of trying something like that.”

The budget for the project is \$6.7 million.

The city obtained \$2.7 million in state grant money and the budgeted city contribution is \$4 million.

But Filion reported good news to council members at the meeting; they’re under budget as the project wraps up.

Mayor Paul Fraim asked Filion how far under the \$4 million they were.

“Several hundred thousand,” Filion replied.

“Really?” Fraim said, sounding surprised and pleased. “Good for you.”

As of Dec. 22, the city had spent \$6.1 million, according to city spokeswoman Lori Crouch.

Looking at photographs of the transit station, Protogyrou said it looked “gorgeous” but also joked that it resembled a skate park, apparently due to the vast paved area and curbs that attract skateboarders.

“Yes, we’ve had skateboarders in there,” Filion said. “It’s the sign of a good project when the skateboarders come. We had our security chase them out about a week ago.”

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